

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAJ-01 /058 W

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R 031859Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7881

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION OECD PARIS

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 01651

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: UK, PINT

SUBJECT: HIGH NOON FOR TED HEATH?

REF: A) LONDON A-1022, (B) LONDON 1156

1. SUMMARY. CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ARE ABOUT TO PASS JUDGMENT ON TED HEATH AND HIS RECORD AS LEADER OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. IF THEY RECONFIRM HIM IN THAT POSITION, IT IS APT TO BE GRUDGINGLY, WITH MISGIVINGS, AND LARGELY BECAUSE OF THE ABSENCE OF A WIDELY ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE. IF THEY DO NOT, THE LEADERSHIP SWEEPSTAKES MAY BE OPENED WIDER. IN ANY EVENT, IF A BADLY DEMORALIZED TORY PARTY IS TO RECONSTITUTE ITSELF AS A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT, TOMORROW'S VOTE  
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MUST BE SEEN AS THE FIRST STEP ON THE WAY BACK -- FOR

UNTIL THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION IS SETTLED, THE PARTY CAN NOT BEGIN TO FORMULATE THE NEW POLICIES AND PROGRAMS NEEDED TO ATTRACT WIDE SUPPORT AT THE NEXT POLLS. END SUMMARY.

2. TOMORROW (FEBRUARY 4), FOR JUST THE SECOND TIME IN ITS LONG HISTORY, THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY WILL HOLD AN ELECTION TO CHOOSE ITS LEADER. ONLY THE 276 CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WILL BE ELIGIBLE TO VOTE. ACCORDING TO THE COMPLICATED SET OF RULES RECENTLY DEVISED FOR THIS PURPOSE (REF A), A CANDIDATE MUST SECURE A CLEAR MAJORITY (139 VOTES) PLUS A 15 PER CENT LEAD OVER HIS NEAREST RIVAL IN ORDER TO WIN ON THE FIRST BALLOT. FAILING THIS, ON SUBSEQUENT BALLOTS OTHER CONTENDERS MAY ENTER THE CONTEST AND THE REQUIREMENTS ARE LESS SEVERE.

3. THE FIRST BALLOT IS ESSENTIALLY A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN TED HEATH. HIS PERSONALITY, HIS POLICIES, AND HIS RECORD AS LEADER FOR THE PAST NINE AND ONE HALF YEARS HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO EXTENSIVE SCRUTINY BY THE MEDIA AND BY HIS PARLIAMENTARY COLLEAGUES, AND TOMORROW THESE COLLEAGUES WILL PASS JUDGMENT. THE CRITICISMS LEVELLED AGAINST HIM, RANGING FROM THE TRIVIAL TO THE PROFOUND, FALL MAINLY UNDER FOUR HEADINGS: 1) HIS LACK OF POPULAR APPEAL (OPINION POLLS HAVE CONSISTENTLY SHOWN HIM RUNNING BEHIND HIS PARTY); 2) HIS TEMPERAMENTAL SHORTCOMINGS AS PRIME MINISTER (AS EXEMPLIFIED BY HIS RIGID AND ULTIMATELY DISASTROUS HANDLING OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS); 3) HIS ALLEGED BETRAYAL OF TRUE BLUE LAISSEZ-FAIRE TORY PRINCIPLES (E.G., HIS SUPPORT FOR LAME DUCK INDUSTRIES AND HIS INCOMES POLICY ); AND 4) HIS INTOLERANCE OF DISSENTING VIEWPOINTS AND A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF CRONY-ISM IN SELECTION OF HIS CLOSEST ADVISERS.

4. HIS SUPPORTERS ACKNOWLEDGE HIS PERSONAL SHORTCOMINGS

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 01651

BUT ARGUE THAT HE HAS LEARNED FROM HIS MISTAKES AND WOULD NOT REPEAT THEM. MORE TO THE POINT, THEY ARE FEARFUL THAT HIS OPPONENTS ON THE FIRST BALLOT, MARGARET THATCHER AND HUGH FRASER, AND THE FORCES THEY REPRESENT, WOULD STEER THE PARTY TO THE RIGHT AND FORFEIT ANY CHANCE OF RECAPTURING THE MIDDLE GROUND OF BRITISH POLITICS. PERHAPS THE MOST PERSUASIVE CONSIDERATION, HOWEVER, IS THAT THEY SEE HEATH AS THE ONLY MAN AVAILABLE WITH THE NECESSARY EXPERIENCE, TOUGHNESS, DETERMINATION, AND MASTERY OF PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE TO LEAD A SUSTAINED ATTACK ON THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. (IT IS PRECISELY FOR THIS DEARTH OF FRONT BENCH TALENT, HOWEVER, THAT MANY BLAME HEATH AND HIS ALLEGED PENCHANT FOR SURROUNDING

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HIMSELF WITH MEDIOCRE YES-MEN).

5. THE SAD TRUTH IS THAT THERE IS LITTLE ENTHUSIASM IN THE PARTY FOR ANY OF THE CONTENDERS AND LITTLE CONFIDENCE THAT THE BALLOTING WILL REALLY SETTLE ANYTHING. LORD HOME, ELDER STATESMAN OF THE PARTY, HAS PUBLICLY DECLARED HIS SUPPORT FOR HEATH, AND HEATH'S MOST LOYAL LIEUTENANTS (WHITELAW, PRIOR, WALKER) HAVE DUTIFULLY, BUT CAREFULLY, SAID THEY WOULD VOTE FOR HIM ON THE FIRST BALLOT. IF HE WINS A CONVINCING VOTE TOMORROW, HE WILL HAVE AT LEAST A YEAR IN WHICH TO RALLY THE PARTY AROUND

HIM AND GIVE IT A NEW SENSE OF PURPOSE. IF HE FALLS  
SHORT, THEN THE RACE WILL OPEN UP AND ALL CONCERNED WILL  
ENGAGE IN INTENSIVE CONSULTATION AND JOCKEYING. A  
SECOND BALLOT WOULD BE HELD FEBRUARY LL, WITH NOMINATIONS  
CLOSING FEBRUARY 6.

6. WHATEVER ELSE, A BADLY DEMORALIZED PARTY IS FINALLY  
COMING TO GRIPS WITH ITS LEADERSHIP QUESTION, AND UNTIL  
IT DOES THAT SATISFACTORILY, IT CANNOT HOPE TO DEVELOP  
THE COHERENT PROGRAMS IT WILL NEED TO RECONSTITUTE ITSELF  
AS A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT.

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** X  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** PARTY LEADERS, POLITICAL PARTIES, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, ELECTION CANDIDATES  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 03 FEB 1975  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** GolinoFR  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
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**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
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**Office:** ACTION EUR  
**Original Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
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**Page Count:** 4  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** 75 LONDON A-1022, 75 LONDON 1156  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** GolinoFR  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 09 APR 2003  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <09 APR 2003 by MartinML>; APPROVED <10 APR 2003 by GolinoFR>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
05 JUL 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** HIGH NOON FOR TED HEATH?  
**TAGS:** PINT, UK, (HEATH, EDWARD)  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006